

VIRAL CHANGE:

The alternative to slow, painful and unsuccessful management of change in organizations

Organizations are in constant motion, changing all the time for many reasons (i.e. reorganization, merger, etc.) The conventional change management approach provides an accepted platform from which these changes are guided. However, most of those change management initiatives fail, because they are flawed from the start.

Most conventional programmes put most of their energy and focus on all the new sexy tools that will be used, the new systems & processes and on communication and training surrounding these. A lot of assumptions are involved with these conventional initiatives. It is assumed people will change their behaviours once the new sexy tools are in place. After all, moving from tool A to sexy tool B – which is better – would not everyone just jump in and use it? They also often assume that big problems require big solutions: a big rollout, cascading down, involving everyone in a big communication & training programme.

In reality, these assumptions have proven to be wrong. Yes, there may be a peak of excitement and adoption at the beginning, but as this fades away, we are shocked to find that people continue to behave like before! Why is this? Because this line of thinking (people will change when the sexy tool is in place) is exactly the opposite of what behavioural sciences have taught us. You need to have the new behaviour up front, so it can help sustain the new sexy tools & processes you want to implement! Not the other way around.

The same for the ‘Big problem/big solution’ philosophy. Why do people assume this? Because we think of an organization in pretty mechanistic, linear & analytical terms. In that context, the traditional and sequential view of change promoted by many academic and consultants makes sense. However, big problems may in fact have been created by a small set of systemic issues. These problems may then need an even smaller set of behaviours which will have the power to deal with the big mess (and probably some other things too).

Involving everyone in everything is also not a very effective way of producing changes or even an effective way of communicating! The real organization in terms of influence mechanisms is far from the one represented in the organization chart! The real organization is composed of networks of influence, where only a small number of individuals are highly connected and the majority has few connections. Using these networks of influence you can create faster, less painful and more sustainable change.

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MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Viral Change firmly steps away from the sequential pattern of the conventional way, focusing on 4 main elements from day one. In Viral Change mode, you:

- identify which behaviours could make the difference and then reinforce them obsessively and unconditionally
- identify those people who exercise bigger influence in the first place and focus on them, not on the entire organization.
- Create tipping points in which some of those new behaviours suddenly appear widespread
- Let these new tipping points breed the new routines and culture.

Viral Change provides a strong alternative to conventional approaches to change in organizations. The answer to change and management is not in the traditional management thinking. The last few years in sciences have brought together disciplines such as network theory, mathematics, and new social and behavioural sciences. Viral change has been developed from that angle. It has solid theoretical basis and has been applied in real-life organizations in recent years. It has proven that it works and creates change faster, more cost effectively and less painful.

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